A REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION.

Tuesday, August 14. 1711.

YOU Have had so many Authors of late to please you, by Way of Speculation, and that fill you with their Essays, as well on Moral Subjects to inform you, as on your Follies to reprove you; that accordingly (as 'tis every Man's Duty that knows how to speak, to know also how to hold his Tongue) I have left off medling with, or so much as thinking, either to Instruct or Reprove.

But however silent an Observer I have been, I never consented to my self that I would never speak any more; and besides, while some sort of People gravely tell us, the Liberty of the Press is to be soon restrain'd, that then the Liberty of Vice may go unreprov'd; it seems the Time may be at Hand, when you may say to an Author, as they say to the People in another Case; You must speak now, or for ever after hold your Tongue.

Before then I meddle with the Criminal part of Mankind, and attempt to touch your Vices, which nevertheless I own, from the beginning of this Paper, to have declar'd War against, let me touch a little at the Attempts I have seen made for your Reformation, and why they appear Ineffectual.

The

The *Tattler* and *Spectator*, that happy Favourite of the Times, has pleas'd you all; indeed you were asham'd not to be pleas'd with so much Beauty, Strength, and Clearness; so much Wit, so Gentlemanly Reproofs, and such neat Touches at the vulgar Errors of the Times: But alas! Are we to be laugh'd out of our Follies? Will we be rally'd out of our dear Brutality? Our Vices are too deep Rooted to be Weeded out with a light Hand; the soft Touches, the fineness of a clean Turn, nay, the keenest Satyr dress'd up in, and couch'd under gentle and genteel Expressions, has no effect here; that Gentleman that has all the Art of pleasing, may yet complain of the few Converts he has made, considering the Expence of Wit that he has laid out upon them.

Experience tells us, this is not the Way the Temper of this rough and unpolish'd Nation is to be dealt with; to tell the People here, that Swearing is Ungentlemanly, and grows out of Fashion——was a pretty Thought in the late *Tattler*, and could we say it were true, would, in Time, have some Effect upon the People, so unreasonably affecting that Ridiculous, as well as Abominable Elequence; but what said a Proficient in that Hellish Science, when he was Reading the *Tattler* on that Subject? Swearing out of Fashion! Senseless Rascal! *G——d damn him*, he lies, 'tis not out of Fashion, and it shan't be out of Fashion, and if it be, I'll bring it into Fashion again *by G——d*——Now tho' the Step that Author took was certainly right, in a Nation where we are so fond of being Modish, to persuade us that to Swear and Blaspheme was quite left off by the Quality — Yet the Truth of Fact was so daily Contradicted by Experience —— We hear, even at the Doors of our greatest Assemblies, under our Sacred Habits and Dignities, the Vilest and Loudest and profest Excesses of this kind, that really we could not join with him, however we desir'd it, in saying the Gentlemen had left it off.

What shall we say then, after so fine a Hand has touch'd them, and they will not reform? They must be spoke to in courser Language and plainer Words —— And indeed, if I meddle with them, so they must; as an Old Poet that had more Honesty than Wit, said of himself.

Tho' they're call'd Misses which fond Men adore,
I cannot gild their Crimes, a Whore's a (Whore.

When I think of the Excess this Nation is arriv'd to in Affronting the Majesty of their Maker, and when I have wish'd that the Clergy of this Nation, whose Province and Duty no doubt it is, would set themselves effectually to cry it down, as a Sin against; it occurs to me——that it cannot be impertinent to put People in Mind, how Ridiculous, how Senseless, how Absurd the Interlining their Speech with Oaths is, in the very Nature of it; how when Men Swear they talk Nonsense of course, speak without Consistency, and in short, make themselves Fools —— And pardon me Gentlemen, to foul my Paper with some of your wise Abominations to explain myself.

I have seen two Beaus meet in a Coffee-House, that perhaps had not seen one another for a Month or such a matter, who begins thus—— *Jack*, G—d damme how dost do? Where hast thou been all this while by G——d? The t'other returns the same Senseless Stuff, I care not to debauch your Ears with it —— But take them in any other Discourse 'tis the same; at play 'tis G——d damn the Cards, a Hunting, G——d damn the Hounds; they call the Dogs Sons of Whores, and the Men Sons of Bitches—— And these are Men of Wit, Gentlemen, Men of Quality, Men of Fashion—— And what must a Man say to them?—— Say to them! Why say they are Fools——They talk Nonsense, and make Men of true Sense count them Ridiculous Fellows; in short, it is not Wicked only, but Senseless, Foolish and Ridiculous, and Men that pretend to Wit, ought to be kick'd out of Company, when they swear thus, for talking Nonsense.

There

There needs then but one Thing for the Gentlemen in *England* to do, to baniſh this Folly out of the Nation; and that is but to look in the Glaſs and ſee how ſimply they look when they Swear, I mean in the Glaſs of common Senſe: I heard a Gentleman once, who would have been very angry to be call'd a Fool, accoſt a Lady thus, with a Glaſs Wine in his Hand, *Madam, my humble Service to you as I hope to be ſav'd* — Would any Man talk Divinity to ſuch a Man——Talk Divinity, no, tell him he is an Aſs, and ought to be laught at for a Fool —.

Now that this may be a more juſt and general Reproof, I appeal to common Obſervation, whether there is one Man in Twenty who gives himſelf a looſe to this Vice, who does not ſo mix his Diſcourſe, as to make it moſt perfect Nonſenſe, if I may be allow'd that Term—— Now really to tell theſe Men of Affronting GOD ALMIGHTY, and of provoking their Maker, you had as good talk Goſpel to a Kettle Drum; but tell them they are Fools, that they talk Nonſenſe, deſire them to put their Speech into *Latin*, and ſhew you which is the Principal Verb —— Tell them they are not fit for common Converſation, that in common Language they cannot be underſtood: When a Man ſalutes you, with how do you do G——d damme, and the like, deſire him to take a Pen and Ink and write it down, and ſee how it will read? Aſk him if it be Senſe? If he would have it Printed for the Teſt of his Eloquence? and deſire him to read it over three or four Times, till the Sound grows harſh in his Ears, and then give his Opinion of it.

Had the Taſt of Language any effect upon us, had we any feeling of the Muſick of Words, this would appear as the moſt unharmonious Thing in Nature, and I believe I may lay it down as a Maxim which will be allow'd in moſt Caſes, That you hardly ever find a Man that has any Taſt of Eloquence, any Politeneſs of Diction, or regard to Cadence in Speech, who can be a common Swearer.

It is not many Years ſince this Vice got ſo the Aſcendant of us, that it made two Attempts to become Univerſal, but it fail'd in both; and happy it was for us that it did ſo, for had it gain'd the Point there, it had obtain'd by this Time to be the Eſſence of Speech, and the Teſt of good Language among us. Theſe Attempts were,

1. To be written in our Letters, Books, and Diſputations.
2. To be uſed by our Women.

In the firſt of theſe it made ſome Progreſs, and the *Beau Monde*, the Men of Wit, and Spirit, as they call'd themſelves, began to write as they ſpake——But the very Argument I am upon knock'd it on the Head, it look'd ſo odd when they came to write it, it made ſuch a Jargon, ſuch courſe *Billingſgate* Nonſenſe when it came to be read, that it loſt all the Muſick by that Time it had Travell'd a Stage or two with the Mail.

The firſt Reſtraint it met with, was, that it appear'd Impoſſible to make it paſs in any Thing but Letters of Gallantry, as they were call'd, *viz.* Such as Love, Rallery, or Quarrel, but if they came to write any Thing Grave, or Mannerly, it was impracticable

To a Superiour, it would not do, it was too much Freedom; to Quality it was Arrogant; to a Stranger it was an Affront, for it preſum'd he lik'd and practis'd it; to an Inferior it was making him your Equal; ſo that, in ſhort, the Stile would not ſuit one Caſe in fifty that any Man had Occaſion to Write upon, and this Difficulty ſunk the Devil's *Attempt of Introducing it.*

Then, as to the Ladies, as the Devil never propos'd a Thing ſo Abſurd but ſome or other would cloſe with it, ſo here and there one of a courſer Breed than Ordinary among the Ladies, came a little into it; but there was ſomething ſo harſh, ſo rough, ſo rude in the Thing itſelf, that ſhocks the very Natural Softneſs of the Sex, and it would never go down with them, no, not with the worſt of them to this Day; Drunkenneſs

kenneſs and Swearing will never be call'd Female Vices.

I remember the late Dutcheſs of *Portſmouth*, in the Time of King *Charles* II. gave a ſevere Return to one that was praiſing *Nell-Guin* whom ſhe hated, and with this I ſhall cloſe this Paper——— They were talking of her Wit and Beauty, and how ſhe always diverted the King with her extraordinary Repartees; how ſhe had a very fine Mien, and appear'd as much a Lady of Quality as any Body ——— *Yes Madam*, ſaid the Dutcheſs, *but any Body may know ſhe has been an Orange Wench by her Swearing.*

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